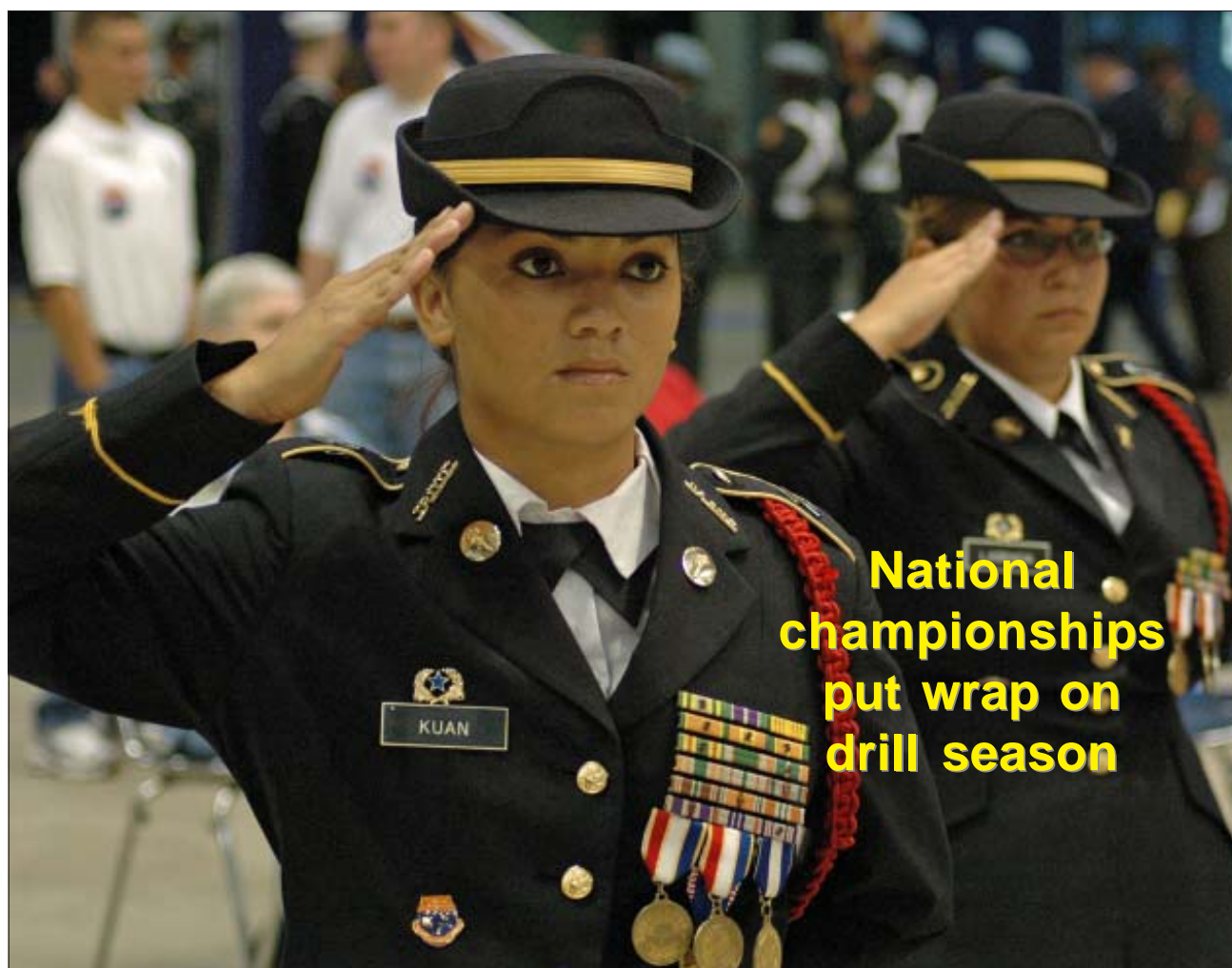




The GRAND FINALE



**National
championships
put wrap on
drill season**

The GRAND FINALE: National Drill Team Championships



Photo by Steve Arel

Matt Nelson, center, leads his team from Northview High School in Duluth, Ga., in the challenge level armed squad exhibition competition.

TIME TO SHINE

Thousands of cadets show
skills on national stage;
Francis Lewis earns
national runner-up

by STEVE AREL, PAO

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Against a backdrop splashed with palm trees, blue skies and waves from the Atlantic Ocean lapping onto the white shoreline, a drill team marched in an empty parking lot. From a distance, their bodies were almost silhouetted in the pink glow cast by overhead street lamps and the sun peeking over the horizon.

It's 6 a.m., and cadets gunning for national drill team titles took advantage of whatever free time they could. No matter the time of day.

Dozens of the best drill squads from around the country descended on Florida's east coast over the weekend to showcase their skills in color guard, inspection and exhibition. Most came to the 24th annual National High School Drill Team Championships knowing they would return home empty-handed. But they all left motivated by the chance to have performed on the national stage.

"That was so much fun," Ian Mallory said moments after his Nokomis Regional

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On
the
cover

Keiki Kuan, left, and Ivette Labrada, of Hialeah Miami Lakes High School render salutes during their school's challenge level unarmed element exhibition program during the national high school drill meet.

Photo by Steve Arel

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High School color guard exited the drill pad.

Nokomis made one of the farthest treks to the Ocean Center Arena, site of the event, flying from Maine to compete. Because of a lack of money, the Army JROTC program could only enlist the four-person color guard into the open-level competition.

Nokomis' routine contained a couple of minor flubs, leaving two of its members in tears after the performance. Blaming the slips on nerves, they still were pleased with themselves.

"We did it," said Miranda Picard, smiling as she wiped tears from her face.

"Everyone gets nervous, and everyone makes a mistake," Mallory said. "... I didn't think it could've been any better."

All told, 203 teams representing 126 schools vied for national titles at the challenge (novice) and masters (experienced) levels. Teams were a mix of Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps JROTC programs.

Fresh off a sweep at the Eastern Region competition last month, New York-based Francis Lewis High School did what no Eastern Region team had done in two years: stand on the winner's podium. Its Patriot Pride squad claimed the national runner-up crown in the masters level unarmed division. The school's other entry, Patriot Guard, took third in demilitarized arms.

When the teams left Georgia last month with region crowns, retired 1st



Sgt. Richard Gogarty, the school's senior Army instructor, warned his cadets against complacency. He urged them to remain focused on their ultimate goal: national titles.

"It wasn't that tough," Gogarty said. "They knew what they had to do from the beginning of the year. We stayed focused on that. It was all about the nationals."

Patriot Pride finished fourth or better in four of five events in the unarmed division, coming up just short of eclipsing eventual champion and repeat winner Flour Bluff High School, a Navy program from Corpus Christi, Texas. Patriot Guard was in the top seven in four of five events for its third-place finish.

The overall rankings marked improvements for Francis Lewis compared to 2005, when Patriot Pride and Patriot Guard finished third and fifth in their respective divisions.

"Each year we get a little closer," Gogarty said.

Maj. Gen. W. Montague Winfield, Cadet Command commander and featured speaker at the competition's closing awards ceremony, applauded the cadets' determination. He encouraged them to always

do their best, saying the most valuable aspect they could take away from the competition was the importance of teamwork.

"Many people believe teamwork is exclusive to the military. That's not true," Winfield said. "No young man or young woman will be able to go it alone. There's nothing in life you are going to achieve on your own. ... It is all about teamwork."

"Who knows where the future will take you all? ... Given the excellence displayed here, the sky is the limit."

George Nakoa, a senior with Lyman (Fla.) High School, wasn't so optimistic as he walked off the masters level demilitarized arms solo exhibition drill area. He summed up his performance in a single word: horrible.

The Florida state champ in the event couldn't get over miscues he attributed to nervousness.

"It's one thing to do it (the routine) perfect in practice but another thing to do it in the box," Nakoa said. "Once you mess up in the box, it's hard to get back on track because you're done."

He finished 25th out of 64 cadets in the event.

Francis Lewis, meanwhile, like many teams, already is gearing up for next year's competition. Practice will begin soon to try to take advantage of warmer weather and to hone the skills of younger cadets who have not had the opportunity to perform drills.

"We've got to concentrate on them," Gogarty said.

At a glance



What: National High School Drill Team Championships

Where: Ocean Center Arena and Conference Center, Daytona Beach, Fla.

Who: 203 teams from 126 schools with Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force JROTC programs. A total of 3,442 cadets participated.

Judges: Representatives from Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps

Record appearances: Oxon Hill High (Md.), an Air Force JROTC program, competed in its 23rd national competition. Twenty-four schools took part for the first time.

On the Web: www.thenationals.net/nhsdtdc.htm (features list of competing schools, winners of the past and complete team and individual results)

The GRAND FINALE: National Drill Team Championships



Photos by Steve Arel
George Nakoa of Lyman (Fla.) High School spins his rifle during the masters level solo exhibition.



(Above) Malcolm X. Shabazz cadets express jubulation during the challenge level unarmed element exhibition. (Left) Octavia Williams wipes lint from the uniform of a Forestville (Md.) Military Academy cadet.

The GRAND FINALE: National Drill Team Championships



Photos by Steve Arel

(Top) Cadets from Palmetto (S.C.) High School toss their rifles during platoon exhibition of the masters level demilitarized arms division. (Above) Members of Xavier (N.Y.) High School spin their rifles in front of the ROTC shield in the masters level platoon exhibition. (Right) Forestville Military Academy from Maryland wraps up its masters division flight exhibition routine.



The GRAND FINALE: National Drill Team Championships



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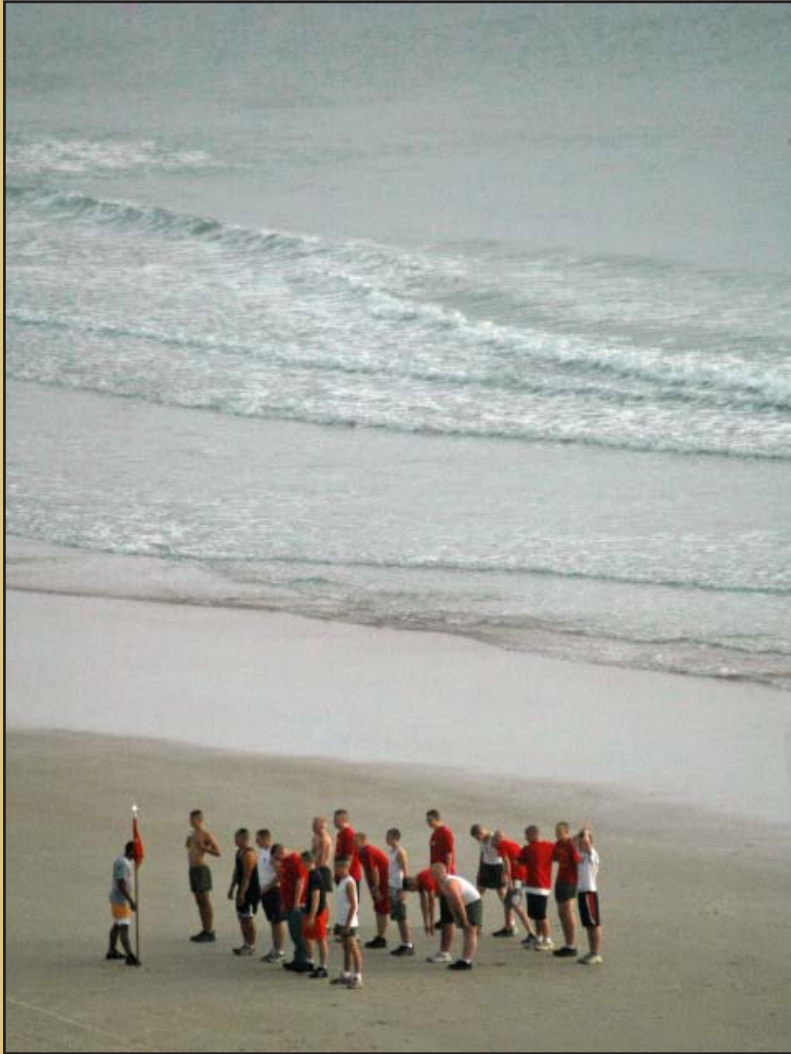
(Clockwise from top left) Cadets look down on the color competition on the floor of the Ocean Center. A mother shoots video of Christian Brothers Academy of Albany, N.Y. Judges confer on a performance in the challenge level unarmed regulation. Various products featuring the competition logo were on sale.



(Left) Airport (S.C.) High cadets execute their finishing move in armed squad exhibition. (Right) Forestville (Md.) Military Academy marches by the competition banner.



The GRAND FINALE: National Drill Team Championships



(Left) A squad of Marine Corps cadets gather for a morning formation on the beach in Daytona. (Above) Maj. Gen. W. Montague Winfield, Cadet Command commander, was the featured speaker at the competition's closing awards ceremony.



(Left) Cadets from Francis Lewis (N.Y.) High walk off with the school's runner-up trophy in the masters level unarmed division. (Above) Jennifer Ladd of Sports Network International, which put on the national competition, sells items at a booth in the Ocean Center.

STAT SHEET

Where they came from

States and locales represented at the National High School Drill Team Championships held last weekend in Daytona Beach, Fla.:

Alaska
Washington
Hawaii
California
Arizona
New Mexico
Kansas
Oklahoma
Texas
Missouri
Louisiana
Illinois
Michigan
Ohio
Kentucky
Tennessee
Alabama
Mississippi
Florida
Georgia
South Carolina
Virginia
Maryland
New Jersey
North Carolina
New York
Massachusetts
Maine
Oregon
Pennsylvania
Puerto Rico
Washington, D.C.

Coming out in droves

The number of schools and teams competing in the National High School Drill Team Championships (year – schools; teams):

1983 – 16; 22
1984 – 20; 32
1985 – 12; 20
1986 – 12; 20
1987 – 16; 32
1988 – 19; 41
1989 – 22; 35
1990 – 32; 50
1991 – 33; 57
1992 – 47; 69
1993 – 38; 65
1994 – 41; 65
1995 – 53; 82
1996 – 55; 91
1997 – 74; 117
1998 – 93; 162
1999 – 100; 162
2000 – 126; 208
2001 – 127; 213
2002 – 137; 230
2003 – 135; 231
2004 – 144; 234
2005 – 137; 223
2006 – 126; 203

And the winners are ...

2006 overall national champions and runners-up in the National High School Drill Team Championships:

CHALLENGE LEVEL

Armed

1. Lynn English High School, Lynn, Mass. (Marine Corps)
2. Clearwater High School, Clearwater, Fla. (Marine Corps)

Unarmed

1. Lynn English High School, Lynn, Mass. (Army)
2. West Anchorage High School, Anchorage, Alaska (Air Force)

OPEN COLOR GUARD

1. Lancaster High School, Lancaster, Texas (Army)
2. Wichita High School South, Wichita, Kan. (Army)

MASTERS LEVEL

Demilitarized

1. Flour Bluff High School, Corpus Christi, Texas (Navy)
2. Douglas MacArthur High School, San Antonio, Texas (Army)

Unarmed

1. Flour Bluff High School, Corpus Christi, Texas (Navy)
2. Francis Lewis High School, Fresh Meadow, N.Y. (Army)

Alternative arms

1. Fern Creek High, Louisville, Ky. (Marine Corps)
2. Palm Bay High, Melbourne, Fla. (Marine Corps)

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